



# China in your hands

**A** LOT has changed in the 20 years since I left China. Formerly a Communist stronghold, it has embraced capitalism and become a leading economic and political force. And Beijing, a controversial choice because of the country's human rights record, set a new benchmark when it staged last year's Olympic Games. When I lived in the capital, the huge ring roads that cut through the Soviet-era apartment blocks and factories were empty apart from the odd lorry or limousine carrying Party officials. Back then it was easy to negotiate the city's neat chessboard-like streets by bus or bike; now the grid pattern is gridlocked, and the already polluted air choked by traffic fumes. Three decades ago it was common to see people wearing Mao suits and carrying caged birds; these days it's all designer labels and mobile phones. As a journalist working on *China Daily*, an English language publication distributed worldwide, I lived in the People's Daily compound a short cycle ride from Tian'anmen Square, at the very centre of the greatest metropolis in the Middle Kingdom. Students were starting to mass there when my two-and-a-half-

Kevin Nash reviews two new books on the world's most populous nation...

year stint came to an end. I flew out 20 years ago, about a week before the tanks trundled in to the square.

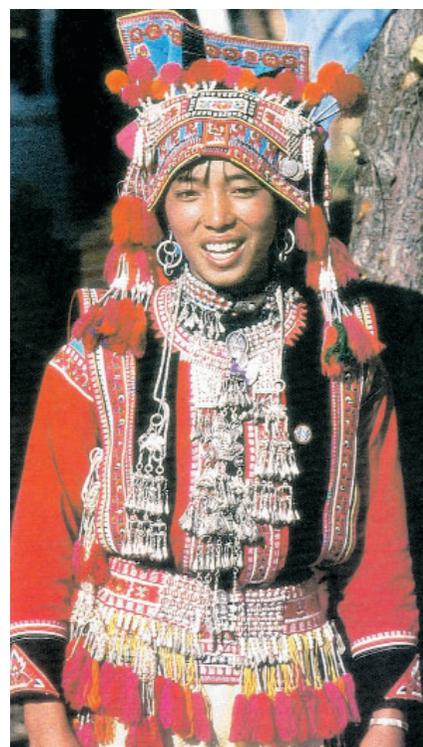
So I was interested to read *Beijing: Portrait of a City (Odyssey)*, a collection of stories, essays, poetry and reminiscences by authors, storytellers and academics with intimate experience of one of the world's most fascinating places.

And another *Odyssey* title, *Yunnan: China South of the Clouds*, by American writer and photographer Jim Goodwin, brought back happy memories of a region that's 1,000 miles – and a world away – from the smoggy, swarming cities of the north.

Down here, between Tibet, Burma and Vietnam, is a lush, mountainous magical land, home to two dozen diverse, colourful ethnic cultures.

It's not an easy place to get to, but Goodwin, who returns regularly, realises it's well worth the effort.

◆ For more information, go to [odysseypublications.com](http://odysseypublications.com)



■ The Huayao Yi are one of the most splendidly attired ethnic groups in central Yunnan.

Above: The Jinbilu Gates of Kunming